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ABSTRACT

The guided design approach to teaching theatre history encourages active participation in decision making while applying knowledge and learning subject matter concepts. The theatre history course at Rutgers University, New Jersey, uses this approach. With guided design, classroom time is not used for lectures, but is instead reserved for small group activity organized around an open-ended problem. Learning objectives, instructions, and written feedback are distributed in a step-by-step process as the problem is solved. The usual steps in the decision making process are (1) gathering information, (2) identifying the problem, (3) stating the goal of the work, (4) analyzing components, (5) generating possible solutions, (6) listing constraints, (7) making assumptions, (8) arranging facts, (9) choosing solutions, (10) analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating solutions, (11) making recommendations, and (12) reporting work. A single problem, such as "scheduling a performance," may take two to four weeks to solve, depending on its complexity. The guided design approach motivates library research as well as required reading. When the Rutgers course was changed from lecture to guided design, students reported a positive change in every category of progress. The classroom atmosphere became more enthusiastic with much greater display of interest and an eagerness to study problems of theatre history in depth. (HTH)

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THEATRE HISTORY: THE GUIDED DESIGN APPROACH

by

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INTRODUCTION

In a March 1983 seminar and workshop on "Teaching Decision-Making With Guided Design" at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey in Newark, Professor Charles Wales, director of the Center for Guided Design at West Virginia University, pointed out that in a typical school system, somewhere between 4½% and 9% of the students' instruction may be concerned with something related to using what has been learned. Only 4½% to 9%.[1] Most of the time students listen or work alone and topics of curriculum are something to be acquired, not something to be explored, reckoned with, and converted into personal meaning and development. The Guided Design approach to teaching Theatre History is a way of involving students in subject matter which encourages active participation in decision-making while applying knowledge and learning subject matter concepts.

Guided Disign was conceived and developed in 1969 at West Virginia University by Charles E. Wales and Robert Stager (on leave from the University of Windsor, Ontario). Although it was designed as a better way of teaching engineering, it quickly became apparent that it could be adapted to many -- perhaps most -- disciplines. This growth was accelerated between 1973 and 1978 by the Exxon Education Foundation "Impact" program which provided small grants to college faculty who wanted to try Guided Design. One measure of this

1. Taken from a report by John Goodlad, Dean of UCLA Graduate School of Education, published in Kappan, March, 1983.

growth is the number and variety of papers collected in Proceedings, the papers prepared for the first National Guided Design Conference.[2]

Theatre History at Rugters, The State University of New Jersey, Newark, is an undergraduate course taught at the junior level as a humanities elective in the liberal arts program. It is a required course for students who major in theatre or television-film. Since 1978, it has been taught as a problem-solving course in which decision-making is emphasized along with the Guided Design approach. The purpose in this paper is to define the approach and describe changes in the course format which have had dramatic results in the classroom.

DEFINITION

When Guided Design is added to a course there is one major change in the operation. Class time is not used for lectures. Instead, it is reserved for small group activity that characterizes this approach. Prior to 1978 students entering Theatre History were predisposed to think of the subject as a long list of boring and meaningless facts and they usually wanted to know how many facts they would be responsible for memorizing. Also, they expected a series of dull lectures. But with Guided Design, the students learn how to use the decision-making process as a tool. The goals include knowledge, values, and decision-making and if the course is appropriately organized the students learn to make better decisions because they

2. Proceedings, A National Conference on Teaching Decision-Making, Guided Design, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, May 28, 29, 30, 1980.

learned new subject matter concepts. Memorization becomes less attractive as a way out of the learning situation because they begin to "process" new ideas and concepts.

Small group activities (5 to 7 students in a group) are organized around an open-ended problem (one having no single correct answer). Learning objectives, instructions, and written feedbacks are distributed in a step-by-step process as the problem is solved. The usual steps followed in the decision-making process are as follows:

1. Gather Information. This is listed first but may occur at any stage of the process. It includes facts, assumptions, opinions which may be helpful or essential before the next step can be taken.
2. Identify the Problem. Frequently, a solution cannot be found because the problem has not been properly identified and this step is crucial if the work to follow is to have focus.
3. State the Goal of Your Work. Knowing what work is to be accomplished supplies motivation and relevancy. It gives purpose to the group activity.
4. Component Analysis. This step helps to divide a complex problem into meaningful segments and although this step may not always occur at this point it usually will be helpful at some point in clarifying the situation, problem, or system.
5. Generate Possible Solutions. This is a creative step which generates enthusiasm and a number of divergent possibilities.

6. Constraints. This step is necessary to sort out a list of possibilities into those which will actually help achieve the goal.
7. Assumptions. This step is made when limiting constraints have been considered. After having proceeded to this point, some aspects of the problem or solutions may be clear.
8. Facts. These may be listed from previous consideration and research.
9. Choice. The positive and negative consequences are considered and a priority list or a table may be prepared to organize criteria relevant to the possible solutions.
10. Analysis. This step examines the chosen solution by asking the questions Who, What, When, Where, Why.
11. Synthesis. The questions are answered and a detailed solution is devised.
12. Evaluation. This step shows whether or not the solution chosen is acceptable. It again considers consequences and relates to whether or not the goal has been achieved.
13. Recommendations. If the work is acceptable a recommendation may be made.
14. Report. The report will be prepared which reviews the work of the group and how the problem was solved.

SAMPLE PROBLEM

What is the role of the instructor in this process? Since lecture

is not the mode of instruction, it is the instructor's responsibility to provide the open-ended problems with a set of instructions and feedback for each step of the way, as well as to supply the learning objectives and recommend reference sources. In a class of twenty students, for example, there might be four groups of five or three groups of six or seven. Someone in each group is selected to be the leader whose responsibility it is to keep up the discussion by following the instructions and asking the group for responses. A secretary is selected to keep notes on group decisions and provide the collective written responses necessary to obtain the next instruction. When a group decision is made on one step of the process, and it is written in good form, a feedback is provided along with another instruction. The feedback provided is regarded as a professional viewpoint. It is not meant to be thought of as the only correct answer, but it may be used to influence the continuing work of the group. It should be used for comparison but not necessarily as the answer. The instructor acts as a consultant, one who moves from group to group to provide help when needed, give suggestions if necessary and clarify points or misunderstandings when they occur.

A single problem may take two weeks to solve, or it may take four weeks, depending on the complexity and amount of information necessary. As an example, one problem introduced during the Fall semester is called "Scheduling a Performance." Its learning

objectives are:

1. To relate information about staging from ancient dramas to problems of contemporary production.
2. To recognize fundamental aspects of ancient theatre architecture.
3. To review and identify the structure of Greek Festivals.
4. To record basic facts about the style of ancient productions.

The study guide includes a reading assignment of Prometheus Bound by Aeschylus and two references in theatre history texts. It also includes an outside listening assignment of a cassette lecture by Kenneth Cavender of Harvard University.

The open-ended problem described is one in which a professional touring theatre, the Classics Repertory Company, has been contracted by the college to perform Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound this current school year on a date yet to be determined. When the money was allocated it was thought that such a production could be an entertaining event for the student body and the surrounding community. It was intended also to be an educational experience. A letter from the manager of the Company states, "We pride ourselves on authenticity in our productions but we can adapt to nearly any performance space. Please let us know where and when we should perform so that we can begin to make preparations." Since the Provost is very busy with other important matters, he quickly tells one of his administrative assistants to form an advisory committee composed of

students, faculty, and staff to study the problem. The problem begins, then, with the first instruction: You have been appointed to the committee. What is the goal or objective of your committee?

The problem-solving process eventually recommends when, where, and under what circumstances the Classic Repertory Company should perform. Obviously, the question of "authenticity" becomes a key question in the process and the questions of theatre architecture, number of performers, costumes, drama festivals, time of year and day, become integral parts of the problem and solution. When the problem has been solved each student is required to write a report of the research and solution-finding process.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

One of the purposes of this method of proceeding is to motivate students to use the library for research. A select number of theatre history textbooks are put on a library reserve list. These are available for sources other than the required books for the course which include two anthologies of plays with introductory information and essays about various aspects of comedies and tragedies. Students, however, often feel the need for an additional textbook. Since instructors have their own favorite sources, this is a matter of personal preference.

Cassette lectures are available, and they, too, provide interest and variety when students are required to listen privately in the library. These provide other points of view and sometimes stimulate controversy. Films can sometimes help students visualize concepts

they read about. The Tyrone Guthrie-directed version of Oedipus Rex, for example, though not really suited to the film medium, illustrates a use of costumes and masks which brings ancient visual concepts into the present century.

CONCLUSIONS

The Theatre History course in its lecture format received relatively low ratings from students in the IDEA form during the spring 1978 semester. After a summer spent preparing the Guided Design projects and feedback materials, the course was changed in the Fall '78' semester to the Guided Design format. The IDEA evaluation was completed by students at the end of the semester. Selected portions of the IDEA results are displayed in Table 1. The results, both in terms of course to course change in mean ratings and in terms of the course's standing versus the national norms, are dramatic. There is a positive change in every category of student self-reported progress. In particular, note the large jump in progress on "Thinking and Problem Solving" (from 2.9 to 4.5, "Low Average" to "High"). This should be expected if the Guided Design procedure was carried out effectively. Similarly there were large increases in students' progress on areas difficult to affect in the lecture format but central to the Guided Design format. In the Teaching Methods section of Table 1 there are improvements noted in every category with the largest changes coming in "Helping Students to Answer their own Questions," in "Stimulating Students to High Intellectual Effort" and in "Introducing Stimulating Ideas." In a composite rating of the course the percentile rank jumped from

the 30th to the 95th. While the improvement in the structural aspects of the course is clearly reflected in the student reports, there is not nearly the same level of improvement in the areas pertaining to the instructor. Personality characteristics, such as the display of enthusiasm are not easily changed. The fact that the students in two classes have clearly distinguished between the course characteristics and the instructor characteristics lends support to the validity of student generated evaluations. It also generated confidence in the effectiveness of the Guided Design method.

Since 1978 the student-instructor relationship for Theatre History has improved. Although the amount of material to be covered using the Guided Design system must be limited because of the time necessary in a slowed process for solving problems, the classroom atmosphere has become enthusiastic with much greater display of interest and an eagerness to study problems of theatre history in depth.

TABLE 1

STUDENT RESPONSES TO IDEA COURSE EVALUATION
FOR THEATRE HISTORY IN SPRING '78 (Lecture Format)
AND FALL '78 (Guided Design) (N=17)

	Mean Rating[1]		Comparison With Similar Courses (National Sample)[2]	
Self Progress Rating:	Spring	Fall (G.D.)	Spring	Fall
Factual Knowledge	2.8	3.5	low avg.	avg.
Principles and Theories	3.0	3.7	low avg.	not calc.
Professional Skills	2.8	3.8	not calc.	not calc.
Discipline's Methods	2.7	3.6	not calc.	not calc.
Thinking and Problem Solving	2.9	4.5	low avg.	high
Creative Capacities	2.8	4.2	avg.	not calc.
Effective Communication	3.2	4.5	avg.	not calc.
Personal Responsibility	2.9	4.6	low avg.	not calc.
General Liberal Education	3.2	4.1	avg.	not calc.
Implications for Self Understanding	3.1	4.0	avg.	high
Teaching Methods			Frequency Relative to National Sample	
Promoted Teacher-Student Discussion	3.3	3.9	low	medium
Helped Students Answer Own Questions	3.2	4.4	medium	high
Encouraged Students to Express Themselves	3.8	4.3	medium	medium
Changed Approaches to Meet New Situations	3.4	4.2	medium	high
Explained Reasons for Criticisms	3.2	4.0	medium	high
Encouraged Comments	3.6	4.2	medium	high
Seemed Enthusiastic About Subject	3.8	4.4	low	medium
Spoke With Expressiveness and Variety	2.6	2.9	low	low
Stimulated Students to High Intellectual Effort	2.2	4.1	low	high
Introduced Stimulating Ideas	2.6	3.8	low	high

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	Percentile Rank		
	Spring '78	Fall '78	Fall '79
Overall Evaluation	30	95	75
Would Like Instructor Again	17	7	81
Improved Attitude Toward Field	48	55	80
Involving Students	38	84	--
Communicating Content and Purpose	13	62	--
Creating Enthusiasm	6	35	--

[1]Ratings by students on a 1 - 5 point scale.

[2]Comparisons are supplied by The Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development at Kansas State University.

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